



Trilogy 915R and 995R

by Dawid Grzyb / June 2019

As a happy Trilogy 925 owner familiar with most of Nic Poulson's currently available goods, I looked forward to this particular assignment since early 2016. The waiting is over, the man's Trilogy 995R and 915R top tier team has finally arrived. Enjoy.





The 925 integrated amp, 903 and 908 linestages, 992 and 993 power amps and 931 plus 933 headphone decks I was already familiar with. All these I'd found truly impressive yet quite similarly voiced. Nic, it seemed, liked to serve up his sound in a rather specific way. In his world, music comes first not sounds. To end up with sonics very much alike regardless of component type or price undoubtedly takes skill and focus.

I do consider Nic one of the most talented engineers I've had the pleasure of meeting yet – very passionate, dedicated and deeply obsessed by tiny things most people would either ignore or not even notice. The sound in the Trilogy/Boenicke exhibit of Munich 2016 had mesmerized me enough to purchase both items shown there together shortly after. Since then the Trilogy 925 integrated amp and Boenicke W8 floorstanders have been on duty at my place. With the Swiss boxes being rather demanding loads, the hybrid Brit wasn't bested by many subsequent review loaners but finally dethroned by its own separate kin, the 993 and 903.

This twosome wasn't really meant to fight with the 925 over the top spot. On sheer quality and performance, they all occupy the same space to my ears. However, due to a loud and clear emphasis on different sound traits, I viewed the two-piece not so much as a major sideways move in the thus far sonically quite uniform Trilogy catalogue but simply a better fit for the difficult W8 job. It scored A+ on synergy and thus triumphed over the 925 in the process but with a twist: some of the integrated's persuasive magic fell by the wayside.

Nic's 993 and 903 added obvious versatility beyond his integrated to be smart additions to his stable. A draw on sonic refinement between them implies that the differently flavoured 925 could win if married to a more suitable load. That's why to my ears it not only survived the brotherly fight but left the battle quite unscathed. However, my familiarity with this gear invoked a daydream about their core traits getting all combined into one solution that'd be free of any and all trade-offs.

As it turned out, Nic was already deep into R&D on such a full care package. It finally emerged after four years of intense work and revealed itself as a three-box statement tiered well above his earlier work. The man not only fulfilled my secret wish but delivered far more. He actually outdid himself and today's review tells the story. Each 995R mono amplifier arrived snugly foam-hugged in a large box inside outer cardboard. Albeit substantial, this cargo was cleverly designed to allow single-handed extraction. One £120 ISOL-8 IsoLink Wave power cord was inside as well, this being Mr. Poulson's other company focused solely on power delivery products.

As are most Trilogy products, the 995R is a hybrid. It measures 19 x 46 x 35cm WxDxH and weighs in at a healthy 38kg, hence is fairly compact but feels very heavy. Carrying it around wasn't impossible but surely difficult. In class A/B mode, it delivers 200W into 8Ω. In alternate class A mode, it puts out 40W (usable 55W). Just as it should given such a resumé, the 995R gets very hot very quickly, hence massive radiation surface to dissipate all that heat was key. Bandwidth is 5Hz–100kHz (+/-0.5dB) and gain on the RCA/XLR inputs is 25/31dB respectively.



Due to its tower build, the Trilogy 995R doesn't look like a classic mono amp. In my opinion its clean design is both elegant and impressive. The 995R's thick, slightly curved massive front sports ribs of different thickness on its sides. This radiator scheme also found on Trilogy's 925 and 993 increases dissipation efficiency. The secondary on/off switch found in a small sculpted recess on the front neighbors red and blue diodes. Red signifies class A/B mode, both on class A bias. The company logo and several openings are found on top and three small footer pucks on the bottom.



The 995R's rear houses a pair of robust and convenient Mundorf binding post. A small socket to connect an external ground on the left gives way to think that we might see complementary items in the future. The IEC socket and breaker neighbor the mains switch and Trilogy's proprietary TASlink network based on two RJ45 sits above them. A petite button next to this interface is the mode selector which cycles

through class A/B, A and eco A bias. The last one is typical class A when music plays but if for a minute there's no signal, bias drops significantly to reduce power draw. Nic explained that it took him four months to execute this feature in a stable manner without any compromise on performance. Lastly, input selection and mute knobs in close proximity to the XLR and RCA sockets on the back have labels both regular and upside down. Because of this, there was no need to crawl behind the product to identify any sockets.

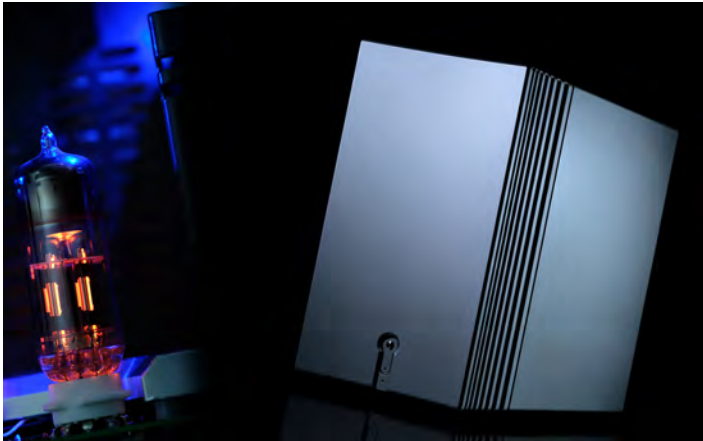


Internally the Trilogy 995R looked as good as it does on the outside. The circuit has no feedback, is fully balanced and so is its bridged output stage. Its hybrid topology involves two 6H6P as voltage amplifiers whilst small linear Mosfets plus a dozen Japanese bipolars make up the compound push/pull compound stage. The PSU is based on a large toroidal transformer with choke input and its caps made are exclusively for Trilogy.

The Trilogy 915R linestage too arrived cradled in foam inside double cardboard with an owner's manual, the same ISOL-8 IsoLink Wave power cord and a quality Trilogy PRC remote. This rather expensive and gorgeously executed controller is normally sold as an optional accessory to complement all previously

released Trilogy preamps. The not exactly affordable 915R gets it standard. The 915R measures 46.5 x 45 x 12cm WxDxH and weighs 19kg. These numbers mark a regular size and shape of unusual weight for a linestage. It felt almost as substantial as my Trilogy integrated. As far as specs go, voltage gain is 14dB single-ended and balanced and bandwidth 20-45'000Hz +/-0.5dB.

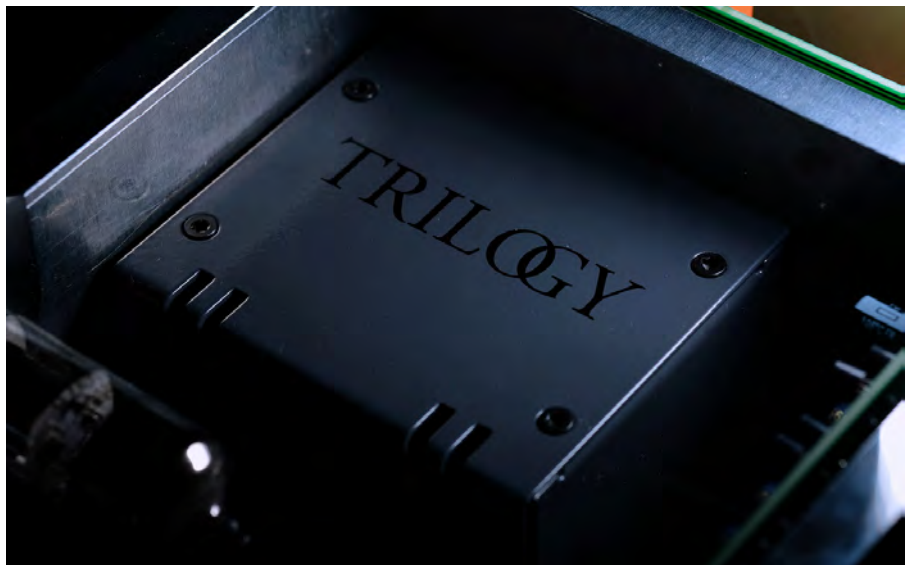
Visually the 915R resembles the smaller more affordable 993. Its enclosure is made of precisely machined aluminium coated satin. The front looks very simple but small trim on its top and bottom edges make it very appealing. The logo is found in the far left corner next to a very legible big red dot matrix display, two function buttons ('ESC' and 'ENT') and an endlessly rotating knob called home. The recess near



the right ledge sports the standby switch and a diode which goes red once the machine is live. It won't go unnoticed how nicely everything is executed and put together. Nic clearly has the fit'n'finish game down pat. All push buttons had very affirmative action, the display was second to none and the superb rotary wheel scored the highest notes possible on heft and smoothness of operation. The 915R not only looked but felt like luxurious audio hardware. To spend time and tinker with its pleasantly responsive interface is to partially understand why it's this costly.

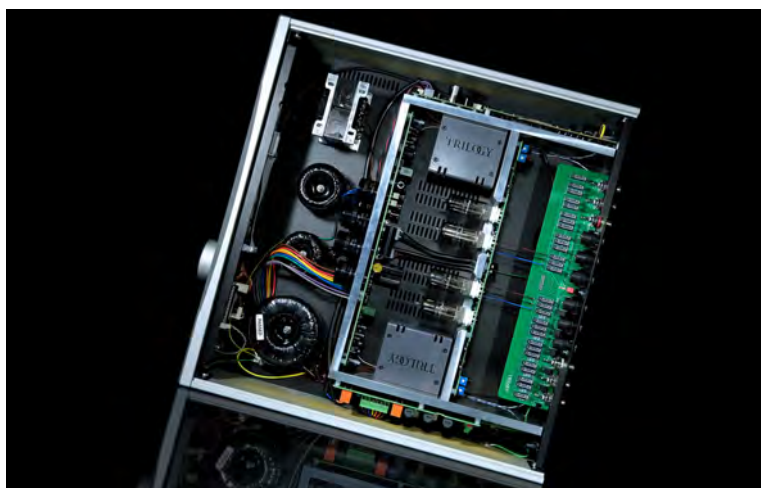
The top sports several openings to help venting, four feet on the underbelly copy those on the 995R. The 915R's rear sports the usual suspects – the mains switch and IEC inlet on the left, the TASlink RJ45 socketry on the far right and a number of Cardas RCA and Neutrik XLR in-between. There are six inputs (3 x RCA, 3 x XLR), four outputs (2 x RCA, 2 x XLR) and one RCA record-out.

Once the 915R is turned on, its display welcomes us with a 30-sec. warm-up message followed by a request for a unique PIN code which can be disengaged later from the menu. That provides extensive features like dot matrix dimmed or turned off, time and date, channel balance and input naming. Certain features which most people won't use hid a bit deeper in the menu – valve time elapsed, temperature of connected Trilogy amps, real-time bar graph instead of volume level, days of week and specific hours to turn on everything connected via TASlink etc.



These options are generous and for those who want/need to go beyond the basics. Admirably, Nic went that extra mile on rare functionality.

Just as the TrilogY 995R monos are, the hybrid 915R is fully balanced front to back with no feedback, has a volume control based on a Fet/relay ladder embedded in a chip whilst the large knob on the front drives a digitally managed shaft encoder. All voltage gain is provided by four 6H6P valves which share a very solid internal compartment with Lundahl output transformers each inside a nice-looking screen. The PSU is based on three toroidal transformers and one input choke.



To review the TrilogY 995R and 915R, a fidata HFAS-S10U handled storage and transport duties, then a LampizatOr Pacific DAC with KR Audio T-100 + 5U4G Ltd. took over to pass the signal either to the TrilogY 925 or 915R/995R team then to my Boenicke W8 or sound|kaos Libération speakers. TrilogY's linestage also battled Kinki Studio's EX-P7 in the same setup. Once this was sorted, Nelson's FirstWatt F7 and the Swiss dipoles came into play to provide further insights. On cable duty were sets by LessLoss and Audiomica Laboratory whereas iFi audio's

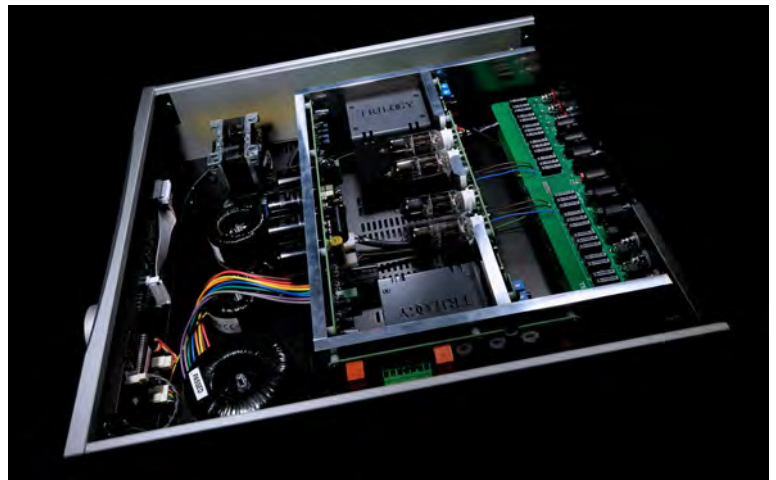
iGalvanic3.0, iUSB3.0, one iPower PSU and three suitable USB leashes found their place between my server/transport and DAC. Each component plugged into the GigaWatt PC-3 SE EVO+ power conditioner.

TrilogY's 925 has been employed at my place long enough to know that its key traits are stage presence, vividness, gravity, substance, textural wetness and calm. This represents an attitude which can easily be called musical and enchanting. Although very capable of taking a listener to its place in an inviting, involving, easy-going and charming fashion, the 925 isn't after raw speed. Instead of hitting volleys in series, it throws meticulous and exceptionally powerful blows one at a time. It's more felt than heard when these connect and this core trait is one of the major substance providers. All these audible aspects combine not into a flashy attention seeker but a posh, distinct, refined and mature specimen.

Unless one prefers music served up dissective and ultra exposed, Nic's all-in-one is very enjoyable. With tough loads it can sound a tad dark and veiled hence needs matched companions to fully shine but which product doesn't? Its core personality and contributions are sensible regardless of associated hardware.



As a team, the 993 and 903 showcased the familiar Trilogy voicing well but to far milder extent than the integrated sibling. Nic's duo didn't sound like the 925. Instead of magical charms, its calling card was agility, effortlessness and transparency. With it, Nic had taken to the high-fidelity route. After getting to know it, it wasn't bumpy at all. In my 993/903 summary, I wrote that together they thrive on challenges and I still stand by it. Of all devices matched up to my W8 over three years, the only one able to keep up was Kinki Studio's EX-M1 integrated. There was a catch however. Trilogy's power amp and line stage didn't sound as enchanting as the 925. This reminded me about my other transition when the harmonically packed LampizatOr Golden Gate stepped down to make room for the quicker far more hi-rez focused Pacific DAC by the same maker.



The difference between my 925 and the 993+903 had been very clear but now the disparity between integrated and 995R/915R combo was far bigger. A fairly brief comparison was all it took to hear it and the following weeks merely confirmed it. We always hear and read about the law of diminishing returns, how more often than not it hits our wallets hard and thus should always be considered. This time that simply didn't apply. Nic managed to graft the very best traits of his 925 to the new separates, then boost the effect exponentially. I'm not able of framing this in percentage points but in the language of the

hifi knights, my 925 integrated took a senseless beating on any count I could think of. It wasn't a fight but a slaughter. That I hadn't seen coming.

The 993/903's momentum and zeal plus the 925's hefty presence and charm combined but the new on-stage gravitas still came as a shock. Nic's latest truly had my W8 in an iron grip. This made the music immensely impactful and energetic. I've emphasized many times how potent Sven's wooden boxes can be here once properly fed. But what Trilogy's statement goods did now



was new: wilder, bolder and more majestic than ever before. I'd never yet heard the W8 this quick, big, open-throated and thunderous. Then the sheer size of frontal and lateral space was the clincher. The soundstage was of truly gargantuan width and everything within far more organic, present and articulate than the 925 could ever dream of. There was no fee for this, no artificial expansion via a forward treble or added distance. No trickery was involved. Everything related to imaging and sizing displayed naturally and completely without effort.

Nic had 'warned' me about this new openness and spatial potency. As a reviewer who is quite used to expansive musical landscapes, I felt prepared. Still, my high expectations in this regard were surpassed by the proverbial mile. Fully developed, organic, finely contoured and artfully separated images not only felt very much alive but occupied equally vibrant space. Stunningly big, served as close up or far away as my repertoire dictated, always pleasantly hydrated, this sound was coherent, open, substantial, motile and tangible all at once. All imaging was spot on, any attempts at fishing for nits as irrelevant as short-lived fads are.



If the 925 punched calm yet powerful whilst the 993/903 delivered shorter quicker more numerous and precise blows, the statement trilogy did all of it without a drop of sweat. Even the fiercest most dynamically challenging passages on my playlist turned to child's play. Without doubt, these flagship separates morphed my W8 into the most effortless and nimble version of itself I'd yet heard. On crack, bass reach and immediacy, Nic's hardware went off the scale in a big way. There's no exaggeration in saying that the Brits turned the W8 into a very much open-baffle type sound.

The amount of air its petite long-throw woofers pushed was as spectacular as the control Trilogy's monos exercised over them. The Swiss just kept going regardless of SPL to make the only show-stopper common sense before going still louder. I observed no hint of boom or any sort of bass struggle. Even the biggest most intense music had that in perfect easeful check.

As a softer, bloomier and slower, far less open, palpable and sorted product, my Trilogy 925 was no match. It was barely able to keep up at low volumes but the higher the SPL scaled, the bigger the quality difference gapped. My integrated also was beaten to a pulp on textural complexity, treble decays and overall articulation. The 995R/915R team surely wasn't a one-trick pony. Openness, tonal mass, moisture and speed are rarely heard together but the trilogy finely blended them then raised the

bar with a spotless black canvas and perfect separation. This made for pinpoint accuracy, fabulous clarity and tremendous insight. The naturally dimmer 925 was no longer dark, mysterious and magical. By comparison it was stuffy and opaque.

I imagine that at this point, Trilogy's best might read as high-performance hardware that's not quite capable of presenting music in a truly beautiful and



fetching fashion. We are used to the fact that potency of the high-resolution approach means that 'musicality' weakens in trade. Today's hardware simply transcends this polarity. Harmonic richness, charm and expressiveness form the core, unrestricted on-demand torque, soundstage scale, vividness, effortlessness, intelligibility and inherent sophistication surround it. Such a voicing is the full care package and the very best thing about today's trio. To grasp this is to understand where your money went.

Once it became clear what Trilogy's three-piece set did in my setup, it was time to isolate the preamplifier's role in it. The 915R alternated with Kinki Studio's EX-P7 line stage, the 995R monos stayed put. Access to their sub menu information was naturally lost as was the handy feature to power up everything with just one button press.

The quite recent Pass Labs XP-12 adventure had revealed the EX-P7 to be a smart trickster. It did many things right and on price-to-performance ratio scored a very high note but also was shown up to be less

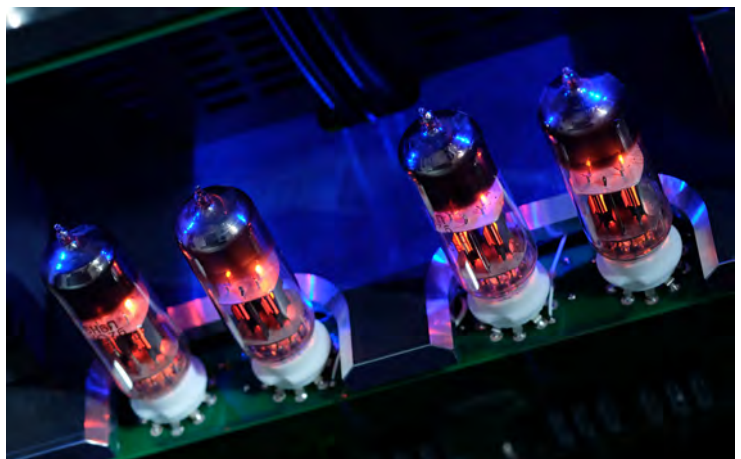
refined, more nervous and with a bass boost to be easily bested by the more eloquent Pass. Today's battle showed it even more bluntly. Kinki's machine was no match for the 915R. Nic's line stage clearly had the edge not on flavouring but quality and exquisiteness. It was very clear that two specimens from vastly different tiers clashed.



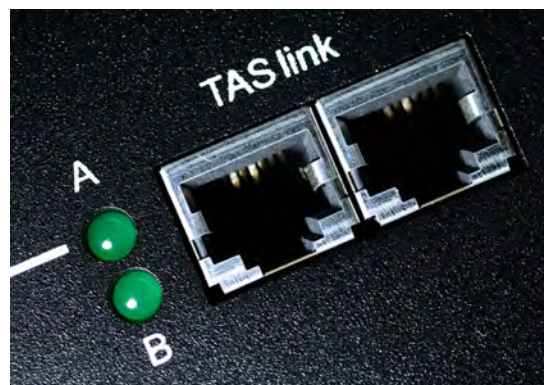
The most distinctive disparity between EX-P7 and 915R wasn't tonal balance but on-stage presence and associated intensity. Prior to the Trilogy's arrival, I wouldn't have labelled the Chinese as texturally matte and/or even stagnant at times but in comparison, now it clearly was. Nic's

product worked with grander airier space to sound more open and explicit but still sensibly moist and elastic. This last bit alone was significant and impactful. It needs to be felt rather than heard. This hydrated sensation is difficult to frame in words. Simply put, one component enabled it, the other did not.

Where previously the Kinki Studio EX-P7 had proved more than once how spatially potent it is, compared to the 915R it now sang clearly flatter, smaller and more restricted. Even though it painted accurate nicely filled instrumental and vocal outlines with ease, the Brit was more insightful due to its more open suave treble whilst its own sculpting skills shaped not mere sounds but tactile beings. The EX-P7's audibly elevated upper bass can be viewed as a feature not shortcoming where the 915R did exactly the opposite. Its low bass was very strong but involved zero boost in the power region above.



With the machine's inherent speed added to the mix, enormous dynamic scaling was the upshot. The Chinese bass on a whole was always present but a bit hollow by contrast. The British bass was less showy but punched harder to create more audible crack. On large drums or cello, the two preamps diverged in the sizing and impact of these instruments. The 915R's far grander more instant bass was similar to what large liberated paper woofers do in open baffles. The EX-P7 acted like a regular vented smaller affair. Also, the Kinki presented the stage between the speakers more distant and less here. The Trilogy was the clearer, more organic and articulated.



This rather bloody messy battle between two linestages ended with their price difference reflected accordingly. The FirstWatt F7 on Martin Gateley's big dynamic dipoles netted very similar results to become repetitive in the description. The takeaway is as follows: Nic's preamp injected more liveliness, clarity and scale into two distinctively different chains and took nothing in return. It didn't shift core flavours but made them even snappier. That was mighty impressive.



One last thing to discuss is the class A/AB switch on each 995R's rear. Class AB bias made the bass a bit shorter, drier and tighter. More forward treble decayed less and showed less euphonic shimmer. The message of class AB spelled out as a bit bigger, less refined and more blunt. The effect was still typical Trilogy, hence not sharp or desaturated but gutsy, involving and tuneful. However, about 90% of the time I remained in the moister, harmonically richer

more refined class A milieu. It didn't lack for speed or scale but enhanced musical flow and engagement. I imagine that with gutsier, slower and texturally more intense speakers than mine, the A/B option could be preferable. With my Swiss loads, Nic's 995R monos with their blue LEDs on was my pick.

My ongoing Trilogy 925 track record shows far fewer battles lost than won. It had been clearly bested once or twice yet never very easily outclassed on every possible count. Hardware capable of brutalizing my reference integrated this badly would have seemed highly unrealistic more than two months ago. Then the day came where its own stablemates 995R and 915R did exactly that to become the very best I've had the pleasure to audition at my place thus far; by far.

To conclude, the Trilogy 995R/915R set looks, feels and behaves according to the numbers on its substantial price tag. These top-line goods score very high notes on assembly, materials and functionality where the clever interface, multiple menu options, quality remote, selectable class A/AB bias and fabulous visuals all serve as tasty cherries on top. Most importantly, Nic's latest accurately showcases what luxuriously dressed artisanal audio is all about. As I wrote in the introduction, the man really outdid himself this time and it shows.



Until now, I've viewed audio as a game of compromises more than anything. Even the priciest specimens auditioned didn't provide exclusive upgrades without giving up something in trade. Thus far the question wasn't about the presence of any such catch but its severity. The less it was the better but there always was a catch to begin with. But two months spent with Trilogy's latest was time enough to understand that it doesn't always have to be the case. Nic Poulson's fabulously balanced

statement trilogy, stunning across the board, represents as close to sonic perfection as I've heard to date. It's far from affordable but on performance second to none. In my book, it's the one to beat and simply victorious. Bravo.

Associated equipment:

Reviewer: Dawid Grzyb

Sources: LampizatOr Pacific (KR Audio T-100 + KR Audio 5U4G Ltd. Ed.)

Transports: fidata HFAS-S10U

USB: iFi audio 0, micro iUSB3.0 and 3x Mercury cables

Preamplifiers: Kinki Studio EX-P7

Amplifiers: Kinki Studio EX-B7, Trilogy 925, FirstWatt F7

Speakers: Boenicke Audio W8, sound|kaos Libération

Interconnects: Audiomica Laboratory Erys Excellence

Speaker cables: Audiomica Laboratory Celes Excellence, LessLoss C-MARC

Power components: Gigawatt PG-3 SE EVO+, Gigawatt PF-2 + Gigawatt LG-2 MK2 + Forza AudioWorks Noir Concept/Audiomica Laboratory Ness Excellence/LessLoss C-MARC

Rack: Franc Audio Accesories Wood Block Rack

Music: NativeDSD



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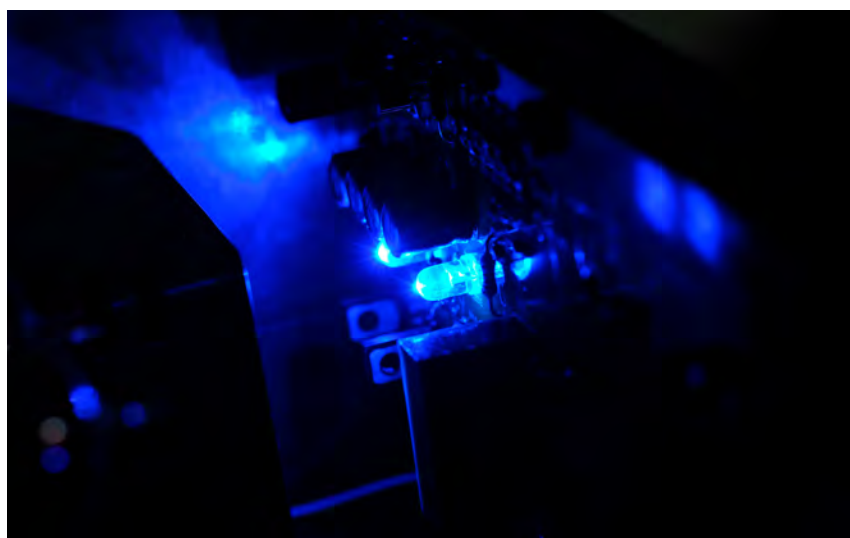


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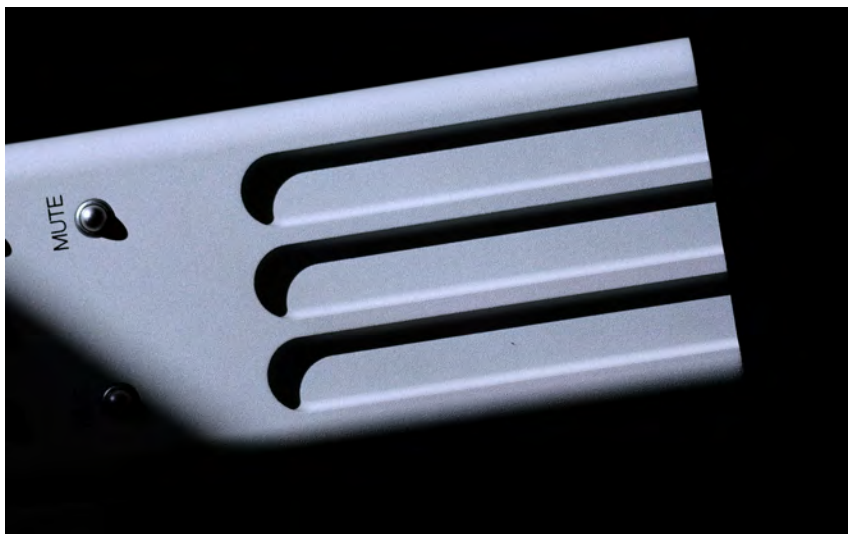


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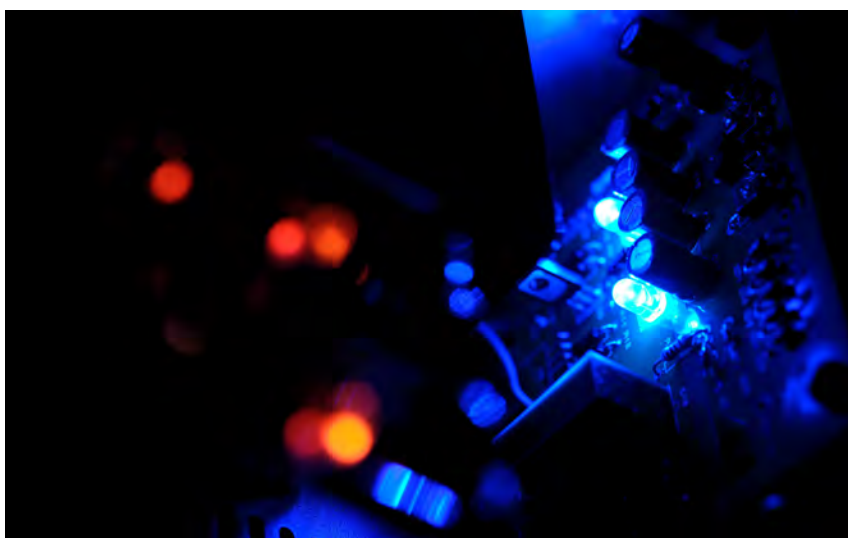


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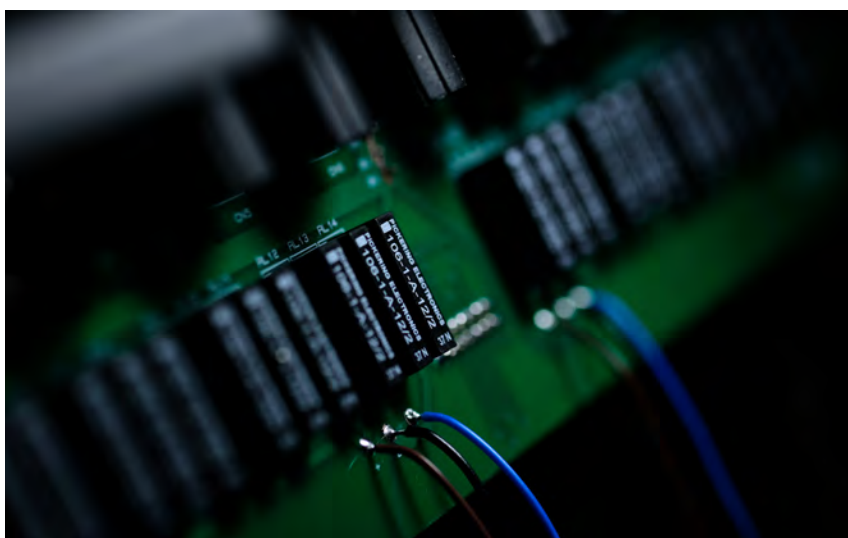
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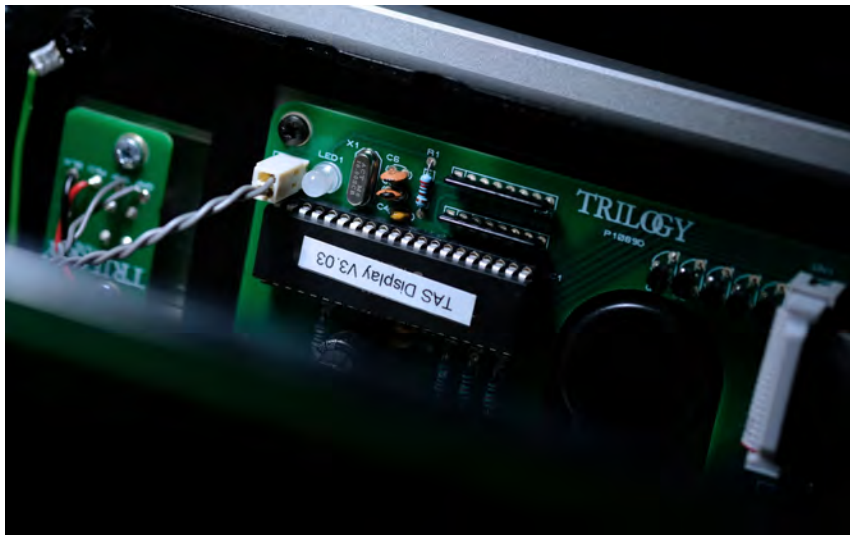


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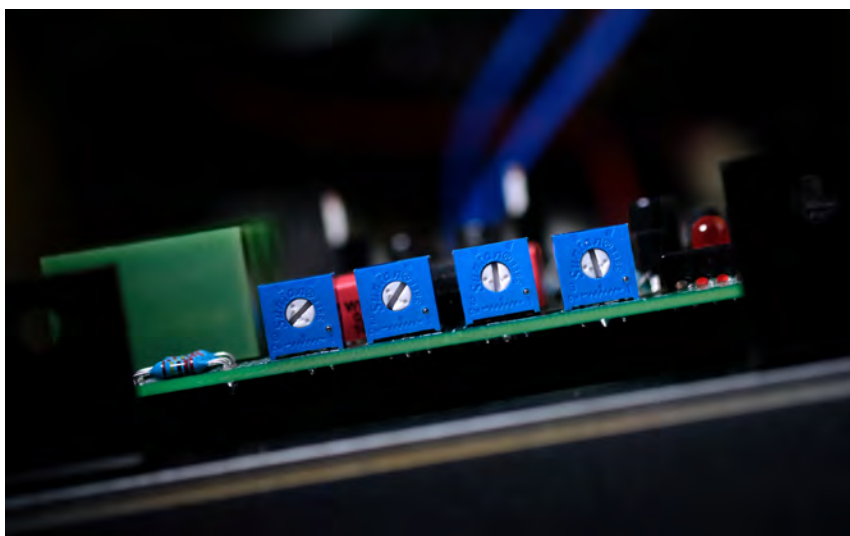
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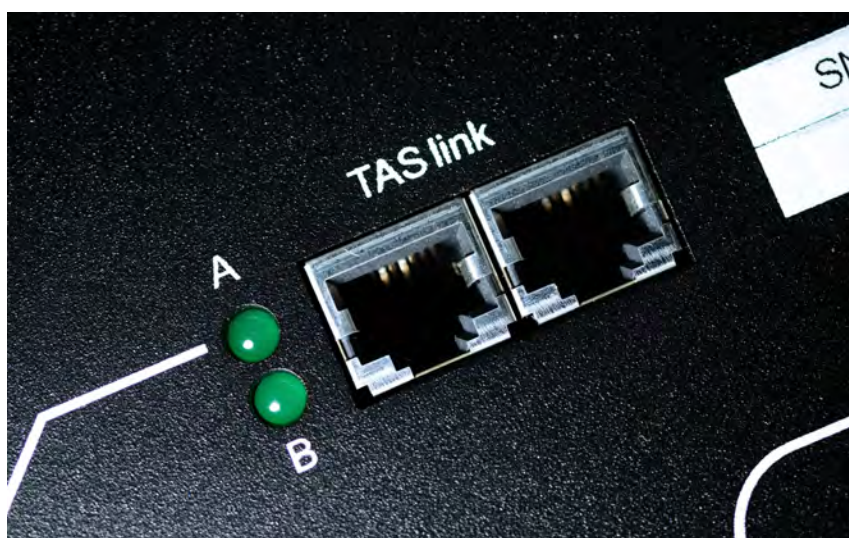


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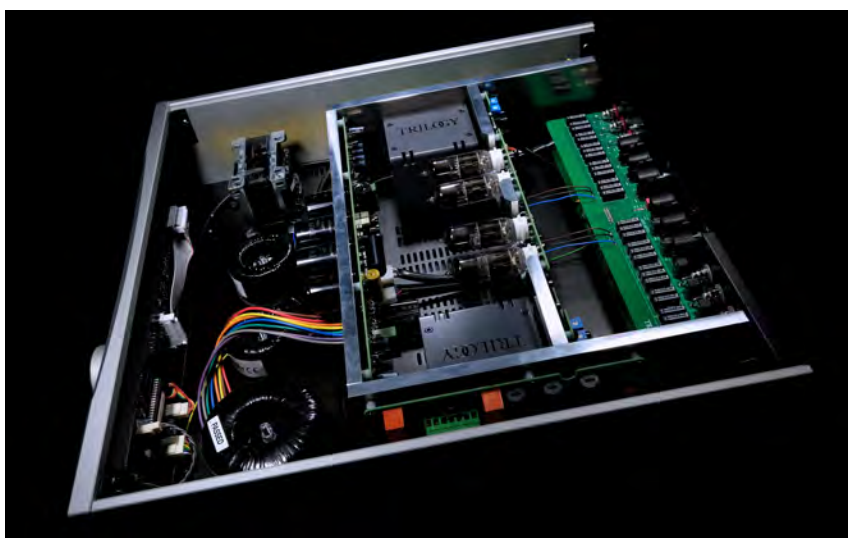


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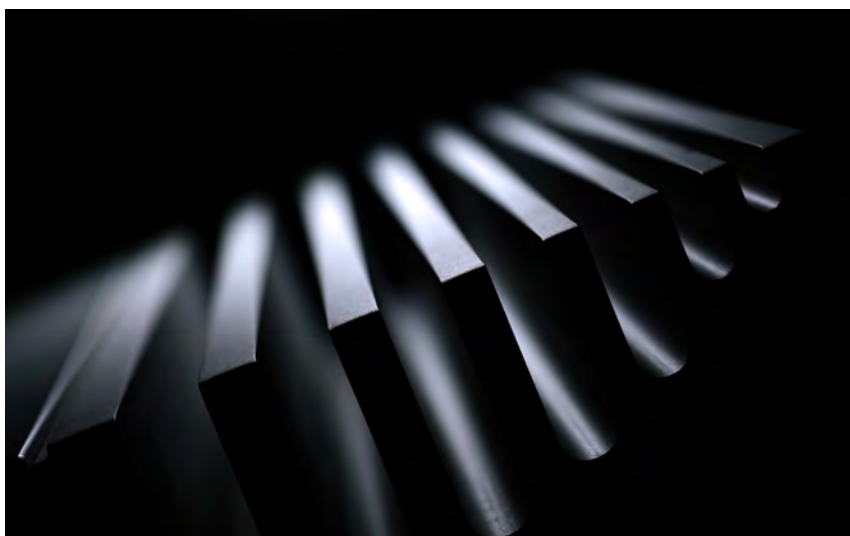
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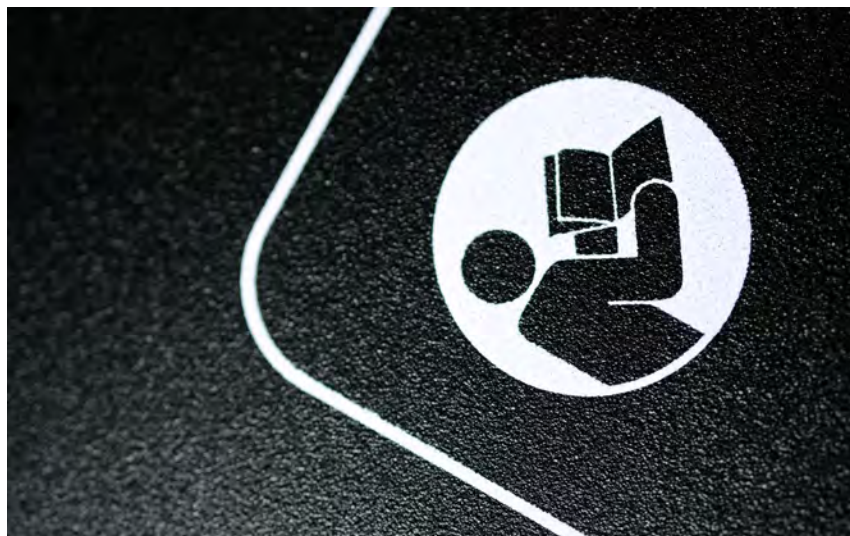


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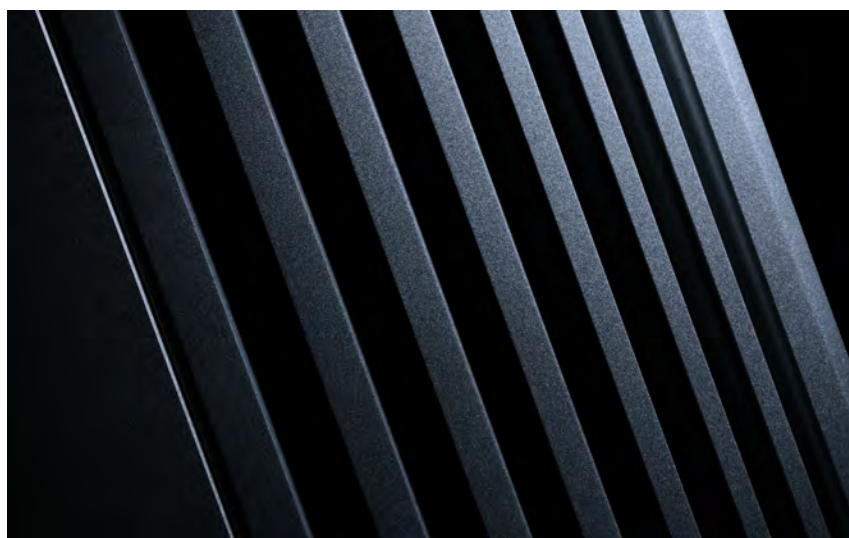


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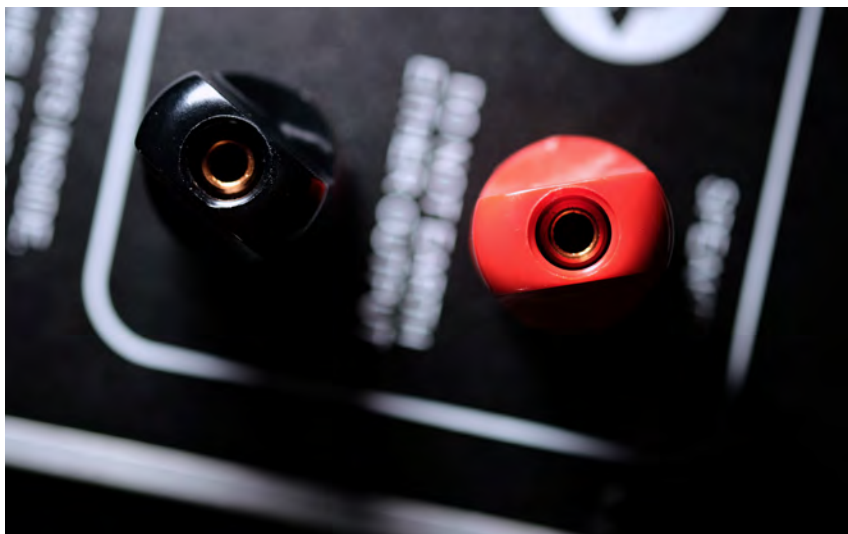


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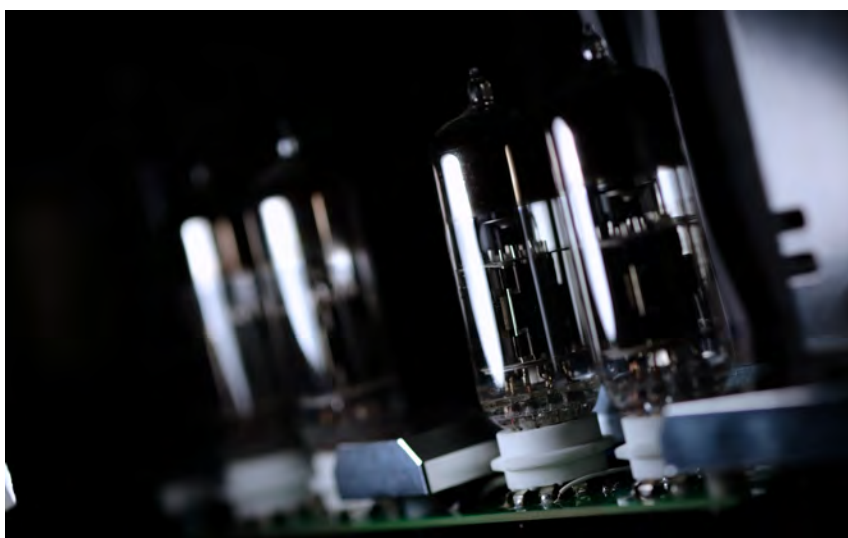


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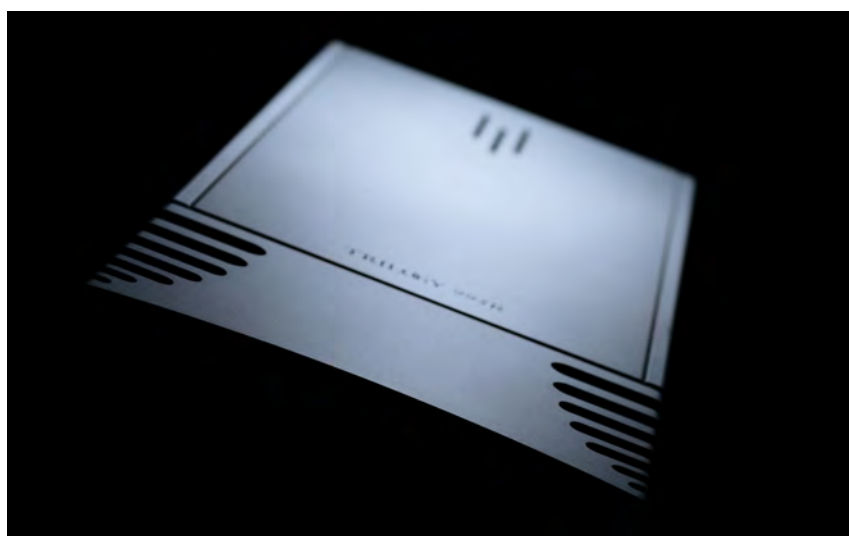
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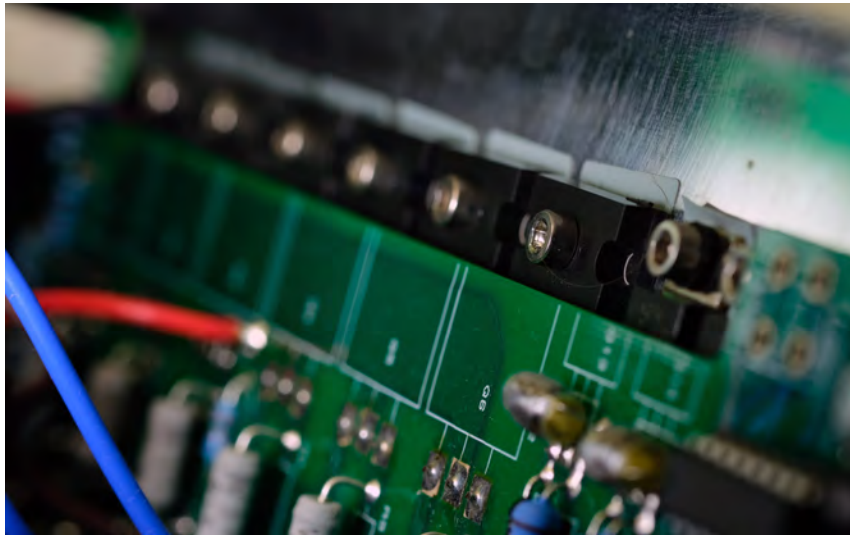


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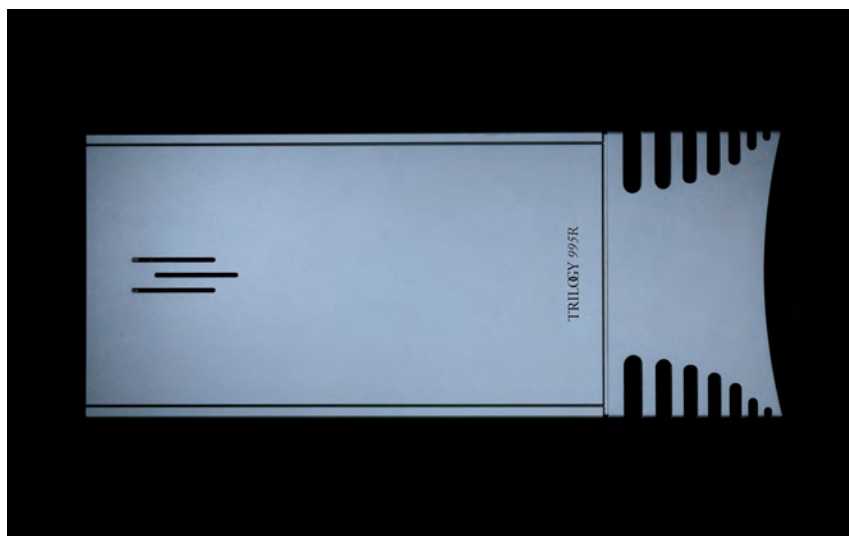
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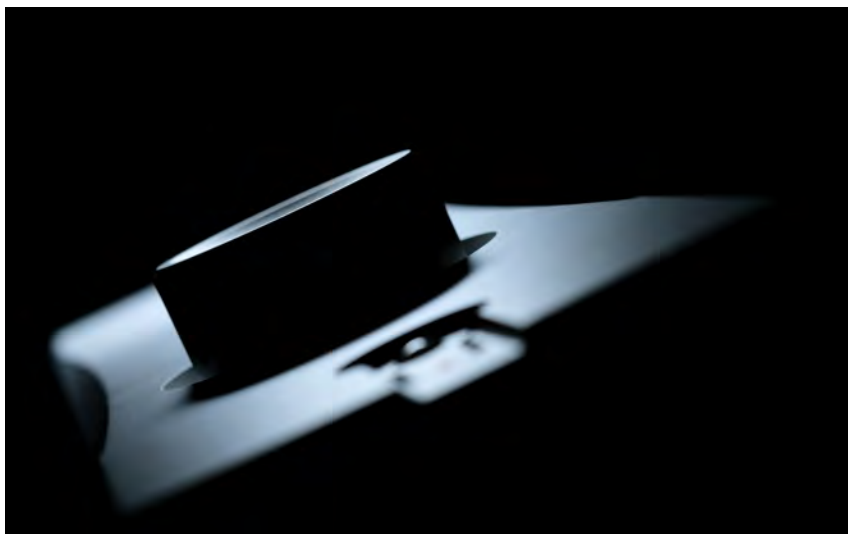


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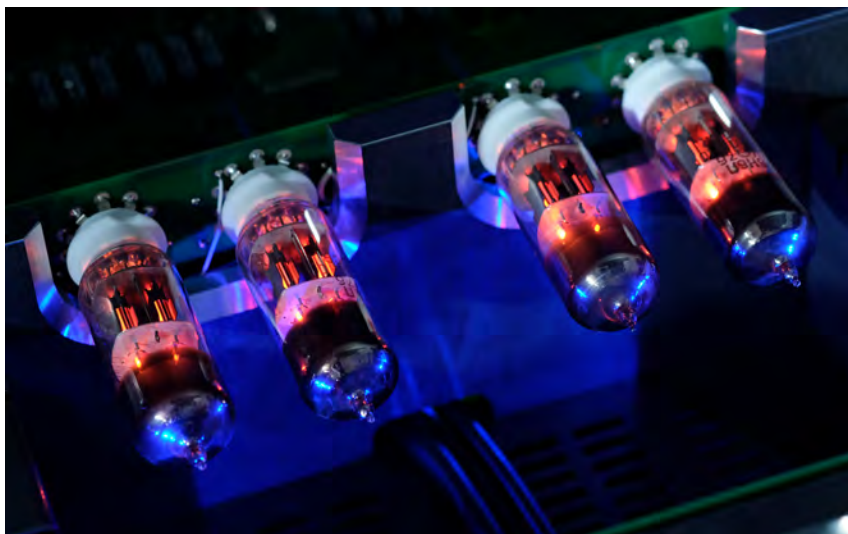


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